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The Future of Biblical Israel
How should Christians read Romans 9–11 today?

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Abstract

The article offers, from a Christian perspective, an 'interested' reading of Romans 9–11 with a view to the problem of Christian supersessionism. Focusing on the identity and character of Israel, it offers a theologically engaged reading that resists a classic supersessionist logic. Drawing on recent historical scholarship on Jewish and Christian developments in the early centuries C.E., the article argues for the underdetermined, contested and constructed character of postbiblical Israel. It then builds on a minority trajectory within recent Pauline scholarship that finds only one Israel in Romans 9–11, an Israel which embraces Christ-believing gentiles but does not exclude non-Christ-believing Jews. Finally, it argues for a retrieval of Karl Barth's insight (developed in the second edition of his Romans commentary) that hardened Israel is the church. Christians are thereby summoned not just to solidarity with others who have been hardened, but to confession of their own hardening.

Keywords

Romans 9–11, Israel, supersessionism, Jews, church, Barth

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In his *Nicaea and its Legacy*, Lewis Ayres indicts the culture of modern systematic theology for its inability responsibly to appropriate pro-Nicene trinitarian theology in the patristic period.[1] This inability arises from a culture clash involving fundamentally different ways of configuring theology, history and exegesis in relation to one another, as well as different ways of assigning

[1] Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2004). See Chapter 16, 'In Spite of Hegel, Fire and Sword'.

authority. One of the indicative features of the modern systematics culture is the split between systematic theology and biblical studies. And Ayres notes that this split remains determinative for those who '[lament] it and [try] to seek ways to bring the "two" together'.[2] Implicitly indicted along with systematic theology is, of course, the biblical scholarly guild. But while (at least some) biblical scholars might find it easier to set aside Ayres's critique by claiming that they are also quite happy to set aside patristic trinitarian theology (as itself a distortion of biblical study), I would argue that a more deeply historical sensibility would not be able to be quite so dismissive. If a modern scholarly culture prevents a proper appreciation of a complex fourth century Christian theological and exegetical practice, then what is to say that it will not also prevent a proper appreciation of a first century Jewish exegetical and theological practice, including that of Paul? Coming to such a recognition is part and parcel of coming to a better appreciation of one's own (modern) historical situatedness.

In this article I want, as a modern systematic theologian, to avoid 'lamenting [the split] and trying to seek ways to bring the "two" together', by reflecting on the dynamics of reading Romans 9–11 as a Christian, in particular by arguing that the question of the future of 'biblical Israel'—to which this passage is one answer—is both historically and theologically freighted. Thus I seek (implicitly) to reflect on 'the future of biblical studies' by way of 'the future of biblical Israel', arguing that in both cases theology and history are always already bound up with one another.

My argument can be captured under two hermeneutical heads. i) A disinterested reading is a disingenuous one. And here I have more specifically in mind as the target of my critique those readings which are covertly operating with later Christian principles while claiming to be historically neutral. It is because of the explicitly Christian framework of my argument that I talk about *theology* and history, rather than, more broadly, *ideology* and history. Indeed, self-consciously 'ideological' readings (whether Marxist, feminist, postcolonial etc.) can be some of the best for avoiding the problem of a false disinterestedness. The Christian

[2] Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 398.

framework of the essay also invites a dialogue with Jewish readers, although such a dialogue is beyond the remit of this essay. The second hermeneutical head is as follows. ii) A reading which hasn't been put through the mill of historical askesis runs the strong risk of falling prey to a theologically troubling essentialising logic, and more specifically in the case of Romans 9–11, an anti-Jewish logic. There may be other ways of avoiding this than history, such as reading in the company of others who read the same texts differently, and in this case with Jews. But history is a particular powerful debunker of parochial, and potentially harmful, assumptions.

It might seem counterintuitive to bring together 'interestedness' and 'history', when responsible historical research arguably requires disinterested objectivity. But I would hazard that it is precisely new, historically-located forms of interestedness that elicit innovative and illuminating retellings of history. The doing of history requires an analogical imagination.[3] This observation becomes poignantly pertinent when it comes to Romans 9–11, in which potential analogies between the groups to whom Paul refers and communities of our own day have been pressed into (unquestioned) identities. Specifically, 'hardened Israel' (11:7 and 25) is mapped onto non-Christian Jews today; while the 'us' called from the Jews and gentiles of 9:24 is mapped onto Christians today.[4] I suggest that the way forward is not to eschew mappings altogether, but first to identify the mappings that have been made and recognise them as mappings; second, to ask how they might be resisted by the text as reread and historically resituated in the light of new forms of 'interestedness'; and third, to ask what new analogical mappings might be discovered. The forms of 'interestedness' which have driven recent historical research into Jewish and Christian

[3] Cf. Ben Quash's related understanding of the analogical use of the imagination in the discernment and enactment of divine truth in history in *Found Theology: History, Imagination and the Holy Spirit* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), esp. chapters 1 and 8.

[4] Such a mapping is operative in implicit ways throughout Christian history, but is developed explicitly by Karl Barth in *Church Dogmatics* II/2 (eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance; T&T Clark, 1957), §34, esp. 204-5 and 228. At least the first pole of the mapping continues to dominate more recent interpretations. See James D.G. Dunn, 'The New Perspective on Paul', reprinted in James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Collected Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 89-110, esp. 105, where Dunn aligns Judaism in Paul's day with Judaism today; and, to very different ends, R. Kendall Soulen, 'The Priority of the Present Tense for Jewish-Christian Relations', F. Wilk and J. R. Wagner eds., *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9–11* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 497-504.

communities in antiquity include: the critique of antisemitism and its precursors, especially in the light of the Holocaust; concerns about 'inclusivism' that arise in a pluralist age; and the critique of racism and a concomitant but complex reaffirmation of ethnicity. The hermeneutical lenses generated by these forms of interestedness do not finally allow us to uncover 'what Paul really said [i.e., meant]'—a chimera that renders the manifold interpretations of Paul over the centuries so many false starts—but rather, they do particular work in respect of the particular concerns they address, enabling Paul to speak to us today.

In the following I will offer just such an 'interested' reading of Romans 9–11. The particular 'interest' informing the reading is a concern about the dangers of Christian supersessionism, which can be broadly defined at the outset as the view that the church has replaced Israel in the purposes of God (but whose definition will be refined as the essay proceeds). This has become a hotly contested issue within both recent systematic theology and recent biblical scholarship. Within systematic theology, R. Kendall Soulen offers what has become an authoritative typology of supersessionism in 'Karl Barth and the Future of the God of Israel'.[5] This conceptual account is complemented by Jeremy F. Worthen's historical account of the changing forms of supersessionism within the Christian tradition.[6] As well as diagnosis, there have also been constructive responses. Commenting as a Jewish philosopher on recent postliberal Christian theologies, Peter Ochs hails their repair of a deep and pervasive supersessionist logic as 'another reformation'.[7] Within biblical scholarship, 'the New Perspective on Paul' has made great strides in exposing and debunking traditional anti-Jewish prejudices in the interpretation of Paul and the 'Judaism' he critiqued, potentially opening the way for nonsupersessionist appraisals of Paul.[8] But even

[5] *Pro Ecclesia* 6:4 (1997), 413-28. He distinguishes between 'punitive', 'economic', and 'structural' supersessionism.
[6] Jeremy F. Worthen, *The Internal Foe: Judaism and Anti-Judaism in the Shaping of Christian Theology* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009).
[7] Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011). The shifts within Roman Catholicism vis-à-vis Judaism are no less fundamental. See Neville Lamdan and Alberto Melloni, *Nostra Aetate: Origins, Promulgation, Impact on Jewish-Christian Relations* (Berlin: LIT-verlag, 2007). However, the argument I pursue in this article finds its resources largely within Protestant postliberalism.
[8] The landmark work by E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM, 1977), still remains the point of departure for most later renditions of the

this begins to look outdated by those within what has been named 'the radical New Perspective', also referred to as the 'Paul within Judaism' movement, which further exposes the anachronism of pitting Paul against Judaism, however the opposition is conceived.[9]

I will start by outlining a classic supersessionist reading of Romans 9–11 that recurs in various guises and with various mappings. I will pinpoint the underlying logic that is to be resisted. Then, in three stages, I will develop in outline a theologically engaged reading of Romans 9–11 which resists a supersessionist logic. In the first two stages I will draw on recent (albeit minority) trajectories within biblical scholarship, and in the third I will press them further with the help of an unlikely but compelling move within Karl Barth's reading of Romans 9–11 in his 1921 *The Epistle to the Romans*.[10]

Persistent Supersessionism

After reaching the climactic insight that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ, Paul turns dramatically and abruptly to the troubling question of the fate of his kinsfolk according to the flesh—Israelites—who (we infer) are presently cut off from the love of God in Christ, wishing that he might be accursed in their place (9:1-5). He then argues that their situation is not a sign that the word of God has failed, since 'not all from Israel are Israel' (9:6), and he goes on to outline God's choice of some and not others in the making of Israel, determining some to be vessels of mercy and others to be vessels of wrath. Paul's narrative reaches an interim climax in the vessels of mercy called from the Jews *and* gentiles (9:24), which provokes Paul to reflect on the unexpected success of these gentiles over against the failure of Israel, who have not believed (9:30f).

New Perspective. James D.G. Dunn (who coined the name) and N.T. Wright are central representatives. See, e.g., Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, and Wright (most recently), *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013). However, as we will remark later, this interpretive perspective ultimately succeeds merely in shifting the target of supersessionism, rather than in overcoming its logic.

[9] For a representative volume, see Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (eds.), *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

[10] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn c. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); *Der Römerbrief* (Zürich: EVZ Verlag, 1940).

But in chapter 11 Paul looks beyond this interim hiatus, asserting that God has not rejected his people, and arguing moreover that the salvation of the gentiles was a means to the end of the ultimate salvation of Israel: culminating in the remarkable claim that 'all Israel will be saved' (11:26).

A classic supersessionist reading gains a foothold in 9:6b ('not all from Israel are Israel'), distinguishing between two Israels, one to be identified with the Israelites of whom Paul speaks in 9:1-5, his kinsfolk according to the flesh (9:3), and the other a 'true Israel', which the following verses will go on to characterise as children not of flesh but of promise (9:8-9), ultimately identifying them with the gathering of Jews and gentiles that we now know as the church (9:24). Paul's argument, on this reading, is that the Israelites' rejection of Christ is not a sign that God's word has failed, since God's promises did not ultimately have them in view but rather the church. Thus the church, as true, spiritual Israel, replaces Israel according to the flesh as the covenant partner of God.

This reading has an inexorable logic about it, which, even after a more obvious supersessionism has been thoroughly discredited by historical research, insidiously reasserts itself in other forms. In this logic, a true is contrasted with a false Israel, a new with an old. An Augustinian-style reading identified the old Israel with a 'carnal' Israel, one which failed to understand its covenant law as figurative, mistaking the sign for the thing, by contrast with the new, spiritual Israel, which correctly grasped the figure and the spiritual reality figured by it.[11] A later Lutheran-style reading identified false Israel with a legalistic Jewish people, to be contrasted with a people characterised by faith in a gracious God.[12] (Needless to say, the real Augustine and Luther defy these oversimplified caricatures.) More recently, among those writing from within the New

[11] Such a reading gains a foothold, for example, in *De Spiritu et littera*, 40-41, although Augustine's own theology is much more complex than this summary allows.
[12] The so-called 'Lutheran reading' of Paul, as it is referred to by writers from within 'the New Perspective on Paul', is a far cry from the genuine Luther. Ironically, while a critique of self-righteousness is undoubtedly present, Luther also anticipates the New Perspective's focus on Jewish ethnocentrism, critiquing Jewish reliance on descent from Abraham. See Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, trans. Wilhelm Pauck (London: SCM Press, 1961), 265-66. More importantly, while a supersessionist logic is deeply entrenched in the Christian tradition, and can be found in figures like Augustine and Luther, it is countered by other tendencies in these same figures, who thereby defy the simplified positions associated with them.

Perspective, an 'ethnic Israel' has been contrasted with an inclusive people defined by belief in Christ.[13] In all these cases, the logic holds even when the newly constituted assembly is not explicitly named 'Israel'.

I suggest that if we assume we know who biblical Israel is, we are very likely to end up with this supersessionist dynamic. What these readings hold in common (in addition to the true/false logic) is that they are all based upon the assumption of a self-evident, monolithically characterised people—whether as carnal, legalistic or ethnically Jewish—as the 'other' which is to be superseded (it is no surprise that caricatures are invoked to characterise the antithetical 'other'). 'Israel according to the flesh' (dubiously culled from Romans 9:3-4 together with 9:8) becomes a fixed term, characterising superseded biblical Israel, to be contrasted with a new Israel defined in binary opposition to the first. Because the identity of Israel is assumed to be obvious, Paul's argument can only look like special pleading in the form a theologically fanciful redefinition of Israel, rather than a genuine theological characterisation of Israel as a reading of Israel's scriptures in the light of Christ. However, the fact that the old/new Israel pair takes such a variety of forms suggests that the identity of biblical Israel is in fact non-obvious, or more specifically, that it is historically and theologically underdetermined.

Indeed, it is precisely the fruit of historical scholarship to have demonstrated the non-obvious or underdetermined character of the future of biblical Israel, or in other words, the contested nature of the identity of postbiblical Israel. Annette Yoshiko Reed and Adam H. Becker, in their introduction to a volume provocatively but tellingly entitled *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, plot the historical paradigm shifts that can be discerned in the scholarship surrounding Christian origins and relations between Jews and Christians in the early centuries.[14] In

[13] E.g. James D.G. Dunn, 'The New Perspective on Paul: Paul and the Law', reprinted in Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, 131-41 [140]. Indeed, central to the New Perspective is its contention that Paul's critique of the Judaism of his day is aimed at its nationalistic or ethnocentric exclusivism (see ibid., *passim*).
[14] Annette Yoshiko Reed and Adam H. Becker (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 1-33.

their narration, the crudely supersessionist model according to which Christianity, as a new religion founded by Jesus himself, superseded an old Judaism which persisted only in ossified form, was succeeded in the postwar period by the 'Parting of the Ways' model, according to which Judaism and Christianity have their common origins in a diverse Second Temple Judaism, but some time in the first or second century decisively parted ways, institutionalising their differences and only thereafter emerging in forms recognisable to us today. However, Reed and Becker go on to suggest that the 'Parting' model has itself been seriously brought into question by subsequent historical findings which '[speak] against the notion of a single and simple "Parting"',[15] pointing instead to uneven divergences and convergences well into the early Middle Ages.

By contrast with the now thoroughly outdated supersessionist model (in which a *new* Christianity supersedes an *old* Judaism), the 'Parting' model suggests that Rabbinic Judaism is just as much a contingent and constructive historical development as the Christianity over against which it was defined, making both valid claimants to continuity with biblical Israel. As Robert Jenson has put it, both are forms of 'Israel-after-Israel'.[16] The supersessionist model obscured this by styling Judaism as old and outdated, condemning contemporary Jews to a moribund continuity with biblical Israel. If the Christian church had any such continuity, therefore, it could only be as 'new' Israel, relinquishing natural or literal continuity in favour of supernatural or spiritual continuity. Supersessionism was thus embedded in the way history was told. If the 'Parting' model exposes and dismantles this, then the more recent scholarship that moves beyond the 'Parting' model does so a fortiori. According to the emerging picture, postbiblical Israel is all the more underdetermined, not merely bifurcating, but taking on multiple forms in complicated interaction with one another (and not settling into any neat and uncontested configuration at any identifiable point).

[15] Reed and Becker (eds.), *The Ways That Never Parted*, 22.
[16] Robert Jenson, 'Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism', in eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *Jews and Christians: People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 1-13 [5].

Paul's voice must be heard as part of this contest over the identity of Israel, and thus taken seriously as a characterisation (rather than re-characterisation or redefinition) of Israel. Part of the reason it remains so difficult to do this is that supersessionist habits compel one to see (even the Jewish) Paul as doing something more innovative with Israel than his 'more authentically' Jewish contemporaries—as a proto-Christian steering Israel away from its natural character (whether as carnal, legalistic or ethnic). The old/new Israel logic simply reinforces and reifies this tendency. Old (authentic) Israel is left to 'the Jews' (anachronistically understood to encompass ancient Israel and Jews up to the present), over against which (proto-)Christians can only be a new (redefined) Israel. The fact that the identity of 'the Jews' shifts—from carnal, to legalistic, to ethnic—depending on the identity of the opposite, Christian pole, gives the lie to all these caricatures. Likewise telling is the fact that the Jewish 'type' also frequently becomes a label with which to slander other (diverse) groups (in Luther's case, for example, 'the Papists'). 'The Jews', in other words, become a cipher.

Over and above these tell-tale signs, recent historical paradigm shifts should surely be definitive enough to overcome these supersessionist habits and their accompanying caricatures. Even the 'Parting' model ought to uncover the following. First, there is no obvious continuation of biblical Israel (both rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity being contingently constructed contenders), and therefore no self-evident candidate to fit the bill of the 'old Israel' to be superseded. Second, and concomitantly, with multiple and non-self-evident contenders for Israel, there is no necessary 'new Israel' over against Israel-cum-old Israel, but rather multiple 'Israels' contesting an underdetermined reality.

Contrary to expectation, however, the most recent 'caricature' remains recalcitrant to these developments, somehow surviving the historical onslaught: 'ethnic Israel'. It has done so in a variety of guises, some more sophisticated than others, but in all cases as contrasted with a universal, inclusive, or trans-ethnic assembly, or in short, a non-ethnic Israel. And even within the bounds of the 'Parting' model, it brings with it a supersessionist dynamic by reintroducing an

apparently self-evident or natural continuation of biblical Israel as one of the branches of the split, by contrast with which the other branch can only be a supersessionist innovation. This is clearly the case when a primordialist account of ethnicity is the default (whether consciously espoused or not), since purity of lineage is sure-fire, unchanging identifier. But even when a constructivist account is espoused, 'ethnic Israel' can still be treated as the stable term in respect of which other identities are innovations.

Philip Esler's reading of Romans is a good example.[17] Having offered a constructivist account of ethnicity, including amongst its indicia the myth of common ancestry, shared culture, and link with a homeland, he makes a compelling case that Ἰουδαῖοι in a first century context should be translated 'Judeans' rather than 'Jews', because of the continuing connection to Judea and its temple, even for those Judeans who did not live there, and indeed for gentile converts who had adopted Judean ways.[18] Esler speaks into what has become a vigorous terminological debate.[19] At stake, on the one hand, is the continuity or discontinuity signalled respectively by 'Jews' or 'Judeans' with present-day (post-rabbinic) Jews. In brief, the danger of implying continuity is that the 'anti-Jewish' language of the New Testament will be easily transferrable to Jews today, while the danger of implying discontinuity is that Jews today will be disinherited of their past. On the other hand, the translation choice plays into a configuration of the relation between 'ethnicity' and 'religion' in their historically shifting meanings. It is in this connection that I would dispute Esler's argument, if not for the translation choice, then for the direction in which he presses its implications.

In exegesis of Romans 4:1 and later of Romans 9:1-5, Esler uses the phrase 'ethnic Israel' to designate 'native-born' Israelites and proselytes, implicitly to be equated (in Paul's context) with Judeans, to the exclusion of non-Judeans

[17] Philip Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 2004).
[18] See Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, chapter 3, 40-76.
[19] Steve Mason, 'Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History', *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007), 457-512, is a touchstone for this debate. A lively snapshot can be gleaned from the Marginalia Forum, 'Jew and Judean: A Forum on Politics and Historiography in the Translation of Ancient Texts', August 26, 2014, http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/jew-judean-forum/ (accessed 31/01/2017).

(gentiles).[20] The qualifier 'ethnic' should give us pause, however, for it suggests that one might potentially speak of a 'non-ethnic' Israel. Indeed, Esler sees Paul's aim in Romans as the bringing together of conflicted ethnic groups (Judeans and Greeks) under a (non-ethnic) superordinate identity (while maintaining ethnic subgroup identities).[21] While Paul, according to Esler, stops just shy of calling the new group in Christ 'Israel', the implication is that to do so would be the logical conclusion of his argument.[22] Moreover, to do so would be to wrest the name away from its 'natural', ethnic referent, the new group being Israel only metaphorically, and thus as a 'new Israel'. The old/new supersessionist logic reasserts itself—which is perhaps why Esler is keen to stress that Paul fails to take this final step.

A supersessionist logic is bound up here with an ethnic/non-ethnic binary, parsed implicitly as natural/metaphorical and exclusive/inclusive. This is particularly surprising given Esler's constructivist account of ethnicity, which renders ethnicity just as metaphorical and potentially inclusive as its apparent counterpart (a point to which I will return below). The same binary is at the heart of the supersessionism that Daniel Boyarin finds in (the Jewish) Paul,[23] and arguably also plays a definitive role in his historical account of the 'invention' of Christianity and Judaism as 'religions' in the fourth century—an account which in important ways innovates on the 'Parting' model, even while arguably remaining constrained by some of its assumptions.[24] One such assumption, I suggest, is an ethnic/universal (or alternatively, an ethnic/religious) binary. Thus, Boyarin reads Paul as explicitly contrasting a 'new Israel', allegorically, spiritually and universally defined, with an 'ethnic Israel', literally, historically and genealogically defined, the former superseding the latter[25] (although it is important to note that, like Esler, Boyarin has a constructivist understanding of 'ethnic' and 'genealogical', no problem being posed by proselytes). In *Border*

[20] Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 184-85 and 272.
[21] Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, e.g. 14, 300, 360.
[22] Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 278-81.
[23] Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994).
[24] Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
[25] Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, e.g. 75 and 201, and *passim*.

Lines Boyarin presses home not only the inextricability of (what can only anachronistically be called) Judaism and Christianity prior to the fourth century, but also the constructive and non-inevitable character of their eventual partitioning, thus further underlining the historically underdetermined character of postbiblical Israel. However, innovation and discontinuity (on his account) are ultimately to be located on the gentile Christian side, since gentile Christians can only claim the name 'Israel' in a newly invented 'religious' sense,[26] framing Jews as the religious other. Rabbinic Jews ultimately reject this Christian religious interpellation, rehabilitating an ethnic self-understanding which (we infer) reasserts their continuity with a pre-religious, ethnic Israel.[27]

While 'ethnic Israel' persists in these sophisticated ways, there is a growing body of literature that contests the ethnic/non-ethnic binary manifest (specifically) in the dichotomy between 'ethnic' Judaism and 'inclusive' or 'universal' Christianity, by drawing attention to the ethnic reasoning employed in early Christian literature (including Paul).[28] Undermining the binary from the other side is the recognition of Jewish inclusivity by way of proselytism, which necessitates an understanding of Jewish ethnicity as malleable and creative rather than fixed (in keeping with a constructivist account).[29] 'Jews' and 'Christians' (speaking more or less anachronistically) can vie with one another about who has the superior lineage, but (precisely as such) their identities are not incommensurable with one another.[30] This argumentative trajectory is in keeping with the recent historical scholarship that moves decisively beyond the 'Parting' model, as Reed

[26] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 73 and n. 204, in which Boyarin partially endorses Shaye Cohen's account of a shift in the second century BCE from 'Judaean' in an ethnic sense to 'Jew' in a religious sense, but argues that a fully religious definition of Jew only emerges four centuries later.
[27] See Boyarin, *Border Lines*, Chapter 8, 202-25.
[28] See Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); C. Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 2007); and David G. Horrell, 'Ethnicisation, Marriage and Early Christian Identity: Critical Reflections on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Peter 3 and Modern New Testament Scholarship', *NTS* 62:3 (2016), 439-60.
[29] This is the implicit complement of Horrell's argument in 'Ethnicisation, Marriage and Early Christian Identity'; cf. esp. 459. Buell uses the language of 'fluidity' and 'fixity' to describe the strategic ways in which early Christians put ethnic reasoning to use, also in polemical relationship with other groups. See Buell, *Why This New Race?*, 7 and *passim*.
[30] Pace Mason, 'Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism', 512, as Horrell has compellingly argued in 'Ethnicisation, Marriage and Early Christian Identity', esp. 443 and 459.

and Becker describe it. If there is no single moment of parting, whether between ethnic and non-ethnic branches or otherwise, then the supersessionist tendency to find continuity in one branch and innovation in the other is undermined.

To return to Romans 9–11, my suggestion is that the plasticity of 'Israel' in the hands of interpreters is a sign of the historically underdetermined identity of postbiblical Israel—as this is abundantly testified to in the most recent historical research. The counterpart of this claim, however, is that such interpretations are in fact theologically driven, taking part (even when unaware that they are doing so) in a continuation of the contest over the future of biblical Israel that historians have uncovered in the early centuries. I suggest that this be taken as an invitation to engage with Paul in a self-consciously theological way, in the recognition that Paul himself is doing theology here: to reiterate, he is not offering a whimsical redefinition of Israel in respect of an assumed, historical Israel (in keeping with a binary logic), but is offering a theological characterisation of Israel's identity through constructive engagement with Israel's scriptures in the light of Christ.

In the remainder of the article I take up this invitation by offering, at least in outline, a theologically engaged reading of Romans 9–11 which resists a binary logic. I do so in three stages.

A Theological Reading of Romans 9–11

Stage 1

The key achievement in stage 1 is the articulation of a reading of Romans 9 in which there is only one Israel, not two. This is to read against the grain of an almost universal reading of Romans 9:6b, 'For not all from Israel are Israel [οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραήλ, οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ]', in which Paul is understood to distinguish between Israel according to the flesh (however defined), and an 'Israel within Israel', or a 'true Israel'—an Israel according to a different criterion which can then account for the inclusion of Gentiles in 9:24, in which the 'vessels of mercy' are identified with 'us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but

also from the Gentiles'. So typical is this 'two Israels' reading that it is even embedded in some standard translations by the introduction of the word 'truly', quite absent in the Greek. Thus the NRSV: 'For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel'.

An alternative reading, by contrast, understands Paul in 9:6f to be offering a characterisation of Israel in terms of divine election, which draws on a narrative of Israel's creation to show that divine election has been basic to Israel's constitution and identity from the start. The gist of Paul's argument, on this alternative reading, is that God's word has not failed (9:6a) because Israel is and always has been in God's hands, such that even the present hardening of some must be seen as part of God's purposes. Indeed, as Paul's narrative in 9:6-18 shows, hardening has always been one facet of God's agency alongside mercy. The upshot is that the unbelief of those Israelites Paul laments in 9:1-5 does nothing to thwart God's purposes, suggesting the failure of God's word, but on the contrary is precisely (if mysteriously) an integral part of those purposes, in a way that chapter 11 will spell out. Most importantly, their unbelief does not result in their exclusion from Israel, or even from a 'new Israel', as the dominant reading would have it. Rather, the unbelieving Israelites of 9:1-5 are one of the destinations of God's elective purposes in the present, even if that entails their hardening.

On this reading, 9:6b is to be understood in a common sense way: it is not the case that 'all from Israel', i.e. all Abraham's descendants, are 'Israel', i.e. the chosen people Israel; God traces one path, choosing Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau etc. Even while traced by God, that path is nonetheless 'in the flesh'. Consequently, 9:8, 'it is not the children of the flesh [τῆς σαρκὸς] who are the children of God, but the children of promise etc.', cannot be understood to pit an 'Israel according to the flesh' against an 'Israel according to the promise' (including Paul's 'kinsfolk according to the flesh [κατὰ σάρκα]' of 9:3 in the former, and excluding them from the latter). Like 9:6b, 9:8 simply distinguishes the elect people from the whole of Abraham's family tree, specifying further that the particular shape that that people takes is determined by God's promise. In

other words, flesh does not determine the course of God's election, but that course is nevertheless woven in the flesh, up to and including Paul's kinsfolk of 9:3.

Readings along these alternative lines (notwithstanding differences of detail) are developed by just a handful of recent scholars, including Beverly Roberts Gaventa, Tommy Givens, John M.G. Barclay and Jonathan A. Linebaugh.[31] John Barclay does so in the course of his recent magnum opus, *Paul and the Gift*. And he explicitly takes to task the typical reading of 9:6b as indicating an '"Israel" within "Israel"',[32] or what I have been describing in terms of a binary logic which pits new against old Israel (a 'two Israels' reading). However, while Barclay is very persuasive as far as he goes, he does not (to my mind) follow through to the logical consequences of such a reading. Tommy Givens, writing from a political and theological as well as biblical scholarly perspective, in his *We the People: Israel and the Catholicity of Jesus*, does. And in my next Stage I will follow his lead, noting those points at which he pushes further than Barclay.

Stage 2

Givens understands the prehistory of Israel, from Abraham to Jacob, to be indicative of its history thereafter, in the sense that its precise course is determined by divine election.[33] This does not mean that it is taken out of the flesh, but that its fleshly path is a contingent and sprawling one, one which can be narrated (as it is in Israel's scriptures), but not captured in any timeless principle. Specifically, it continues to be the case that 'not all from Israel are Israel', now parsed as 'not all stemming from Jacob are Israel', insofar as over time various Israelite branches become gradually assimilated to gentile ways,

[31] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 'On the Calling-Into-Being of Israel: Romans 9:6-29', in Wilk and Wagner eds., *Between Gospel and Election*, 255-69; Tommy Givens, *We the People: Israel and the Catholicity of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 345-411; John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2015), esp. 526-36; Jonathan A. Linebaugh, 'Not the End: The History and Hope of the Unfailing Word in Romans 9-11', in Beverly Roberts Gaventa, Todd Still and Bruce Longenecker (eds.), *Has God Rejected His People? Essays on Romans 9-11* (Waco: Baylor University Press, forthcoming).

[32] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 527.

[33] Givens offers a reading of Romans 9–11 in the culminating chapter of his monograph, in the context of the understanding of the divine election of Israel he has developed earlier in the book in engagement with political and theological dialogue partners, and in close attention to the dynamics of the story of Israel as narrated in the Old Testament.

ultimately losing their connection with the people of Israel and its God altogether.[34] This was indeed, most dramatically, the fate of much of the northern kingdom in the aftermath of the Assyrian invasion. But in the other direction, too, gentiles have been incorporated into Israel at numerous points in its history, not thereby diluting or polluting its identity. This is arguably evident not only from Israel's genealogies, and biblical examples of apparently unexceptionable intermarriages with gentiles, but also from legal discussion of the *gēr* in the Torah (esp. Exod 12:48-49). The fact that proselytization or conversion was only formalised by the rabbis does not mean that something analogous was not going on earlier, even if in more informal ways.[35]

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[34] Givens, *We the People*, 356.

[35] Givens, *We the People*, 243-72, in the course of which Givens offers a withering critique of 'ethnic Israel' (244-56). Givens indicates the prevalence of the assumption of an ethnic Israel within the scholarly literature. However, we might differentiate between those instances in which the assumption is unreflective, implicitly buying into an unquestioned primordialist account, and those instances in which ethnicity is treated within a constructivist theoretical framework (and there are likely to be instances in which both tendencies are displayed at once). The former are clearly subject to the critique of Denise Kimber Buell and others (see n. 28 above). The latter must be treated with more care. A recent, compelling alternative to Givens's account of biblical Israel's relation to gentile outsiders is offered by Matthew Thiessen in *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (New York: OUP, 2011). Thiessen rereads those scriptural passages which might suggest that outsiders can become Israelites by way of circumcision in such a way as to exclude the possibility. On his reading, eighth day circumcision is emphasised in order to protect an exclusive, genealogical definition of Israel (see esp. chs. 1 and 2). Thiessen's reading is incisive, but it is resisted by the complexity of the material it tries to marshal, as well as by the present scholarly consensus. Joel S. Kaminsky gently accuses Thiessen of reading the insider/outsider binary to be found in *Jubilees* back into the Hebrew biblical texts (review of Thiessen in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 6:1 [2011], electronic journal). Moreover, Christine E. Hayes, in *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (New York: OUP, 2002), who reads *Jubilees* in a similar way to Thiessen, contrasts its genealogical definition of Israel with an earlier biblical definition that was primarily moral-religious, allowing gentiles to enter the community to one degree or another. In particular, Hayes notes the limited and non-universal nature of the Torah's prohibition of intermarriage with gentiles, and its moral-religious motivation, pointing to several examples of accepted exogamy, including the marriages of Moses and Joseph (24-26, and n. 25). According to Hayes, 'Ezra is the first to define Jewish identity in almost exclusively genealogical terms' (10). In keeping with Hayes, Jon Levenson, in 'The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism', in Mark G. Brett (ed.), *Ethnicity and the Bible* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2002), 143-69, points (for example) to Exod 12:38, Ruth 1:16 and Lev 19:34 as evidence for the possibility of some degree of integration of the foreigner into Israel (162), concluding that biblical Israel defies a simplistic dichotomy between the possibility or impossibility of conversion. In 'The *Gēr* in the Priestly Laws of the Pentateuch', in Mark G. Brett (ed.), *Ethnicity and the Bible* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2002), 77-87, Rolf Rendtorff offers a complex picture of the treatment of the *gēr* in Hebrew biblical law codes, a picture which (again) defies simple binaries. Thus, while Rendtorff concedes that 'the *gēr* does not belong to "Israel"', the thrust of his essay is nevertheless to highlight the inclusivity of many of the laws, and the variegated character of Israel, allowing for different levels of participation, such that one begins to wonder whether his initial concession indicates the creeping in of an Israel/non-Israel binary, and needs to be reworked in the light of his findings. Either way, Thiessen's account is, by contrast, too neat. An approach to Israelite identity in keeping with Givens's critique of 'ethnic

The consequence of this is that no redefinition of Israel is required in order to account for the inclusion of gentiles by way of Paul's mission. Barclay, arguably still in thrall to an (primordialist) ethnic definition of Israel, cannot envisage gentiles becoming part of Israel; rather, they are elected by the God who first elected Israel.[36] Thus, for him, the distinction between the natural and unnatural branches of the olive tree in Romans 11 is that between Jews (or Israel, ethnically understood) and gentiles (who remain ethnically other than Israel), both of whom share in the root of God's election.[37] On Givens's reading, by contrast, naturalisation is a matter of time. Paul is addressing the upstart gentiles in his audience, who have only of late been adopted into the family, and so have not yet come to share in its life in the thick-textured way that his kinsfolk according to the flesh do. Thus they have no reason to boast over longstanding family members, who may presently be alienated from the richness of their family life (having been broken off from the tree), but are still part of the family, and whose family ties hold that richness open to them.[38] The Jewish/gentile distinction is relative, and shifts over time as God weaves Israel through history.

On Givens's reading, Paul's argument in Romans 9–11 is directed at these upstart gentiles, and is directed against their disownment of those unbelieving Israelites whom Paul names 'enemies with regards to the gospel' (11:28). Rather, these presently hostile relatives must be recognised by the newcomer gentiles as fellow Israelites, united in the one Israel that God is weaving through history; to disown them on account of their hostility would be to take God's elective agency into their own hands.[39]

Israel', as well as with Buell's constructivist account of ethnicity, is to be found in Amanda Beckenstein Mbuvi's *Belonging in Genesis: Biblical Israel and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016). Mbuvi is critical of the pervasive tendency to read Genesis according to a modern understanding of race, showing, by contrast, how it 'depicts [communal identity] as preeminently a product of negotiation' (145), and how it envisages, not an in/out binary, but 'insiders of different stripes' (137).

[36] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 551 n. 75.

[37] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 551.

[38] Cf. Givens, *We the People*, 403-406 and 408, where such a reading of the natural/unnatural distinction is implied rather than explicitly elaborated.

[39] Givens, *We the People*, 394-96.

The ramifications for the identity of Israel are profound. While a 'two Israels' reading invites boundaries to be drawn around the 'new Israel' according to some criterion (whether it be belief in Christ, a justifying faith, the marks of election, or something else), a 'one Israel' reading along the present lines rules out any such boundary drawing. Instead, one is summoned to show solidarity with one's enemies, even in their sin, as part of the one people of God.[40] This is ethically challenging in that it makes a sharp distinction between inclusion and approval, or negatively between disapproval and disownment. To recognise another as part of the one people of God does not preclude critique and even condemnation of that other's manner of being the people. Conversely, one might find one's own community subject to critique in the light of other enactments of Israel, from which one can learn.

But a 'one Israel' reading is also challenging in its implications for the breadth and diversity of Israel today. Israel is neither limited by a primordialist account of ethnicity, nor by a theologically driven definition of a 'true' Israel. In his wider project, Givens characterises Israel as 'the people that remembers the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as its own', in whatever form and however tenuously.[41] Note quite how inclusive this is. There is no limitation to those who *truly* or *rightly* remember the God of Israel, and therefore no room for competitive claims to monopoly over that God's name. There is an invitation, instead, to recognise where the name is in fact invoked, and concomitantly to find there a branch of the people of God (however apparently faithless). Givens's Israel thus embraces not only Christians, Jews and arguably Muslims, but even those 'secular' nations that have modelled themselves as the new Israel. In short, no claimants to the name Israel can be discounted. The distinction between disownment and condemnation becomes all the more vital in this context.

Stage 3

[40] Givens contrasts a self-constituted people which 'police[s] the border of its identity', and a people constituted by divine election, arguing that the God of Israel holds the faithful and the unfaithful together, inviting solidarity with rather than disownment of the unfaithful. See Givens, *We the People*, 88-105 [88], and *passim*. This is 'the catholicity of Jesus', as the book's subtitle has it.

[41] Givens, *We the People*, 261-270 [270].

In a final stage of my engagement with Romans 9–11 I push beyond even Givens's reading, although not by challenging his characterisation of Israel per se. Rather, I suggest that if the church today is going to understand itself as (part of) Israel, claiming the name Israel for itself (even if not exclusively), then it will not be long, or at least should not be long, before it recognises that it has itself become hardened Israel, no longer the marginal gathering around the apostles of Christ, but a well-established institution which cannot escape the kind of systemic corruption for which the prophets called Israel of old to account. This is one of the radical insights of Karl Barth's *Romans*, in which Barth equates the Israel lamented by Paul in Romans 9 with 'the Church'.[42] I follow Barth in this insight here, but with the hindsight provided by the historical paradigm shifts summarised above, and therefore without eliding Jews and Judaism from discussion of the text, as Barth does in his commentary.[43]

One of the great challenges of reading Romans 9–11 today is how to avoid certain kinds of mapping. The overwhelming temptation, as I have noted, is to map the Israelites of 9:1-5 onto (non-Christian) Jews today and the 'us called not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles' (9:24) onto the church. The first pole of this mapping should have been thoroughly debunked by the foregoing. Quite apart from the bewildering diversity of Jews today, which defies any one-to-one mapping, the 'Judaism' inherited and cultivated by many Jews today was not yet in evidence in Paul's day, being (at the earliest) a post-rabbinic, historically contingent construct, defined (among other things) over against a novel Christianity. The second pole of the mapping, as the other side of the same coin, has therefore also been implicitly debunked: the Christian church, now

[42] Karl Barth, *Romans*, esp. 332. Barth entitles his chapter on Romans 9 'The Tribulation of the Church'.

[43] Except insofar as 'Judaism' comes under the banner of 'religion'. In his later reading in *Church Dogmatics* II/2, by contrast, Jews figure prominently insofar as Israel is understood as 'the Jewish people' (see Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, § 34, 195-305). But by the same token, the critical insight of his *Romans* is lost, and a subtle supersessionism is introduced. See Douglas Harink, 'Barth's Apocalyptic Exegesis and the Question of Israel in *Römerbrief*, Chapters 9–11', Toronto Journal of Theology, 25:1 (2009), 5-18, which commends the nonsupersessionist dynamic of Barth's commentary insofar as it 'subverts any historicist … readings of the relation between Israel and the Church' (5), although Harink goes on to critique aspects of Barth's reading on exegetical grounds, questioning his elision of Israel, and reintroducing the irrevocably differentiated character of God's creation. Harink notes that Barth did not repeat this mistake in his treatment of Israel in the *Church Dogmatics* (16).

quite separate from the synagogue, is quite different from the precarious gathering of which Paul speaks, which remains (albeit not without tension) within a broader, contested Judaism.

Within Givens's reading, however, the second pole remains surprisingly but stubbornly in place. To recall, the purpose of Paul's argument, on his reading, is to summon the addressee to solidarity with the disobedient in Israel, who cannot be disowned. The implied reader, for Givens, is Paul's 'us'. We read, with Givens, as believers in Christ for whom hardened Israel is always the other, however much we are invited into solidarity with them. This is surprising, given that Givens's has argued for the historically contingent character of Israel, which is woven through time in the incorporation of those who were previously outsiders, and in the gradual weaving out of others who were previously insiders. Specifically, if gentiles can be incorporated so as to become fully part of Israel—and are so on an unprecedented scale in the context of Paul's gentile mission—then over time they will be naturalised in the ways of Israel and will no longer be gentile upstarts of the kind that Paul addresses in Romans 11. In other words, (non-Jewish) Christians as naturalised members of Israel today are no longer the unnatural, precarious insiders of Paul's address. (While this may be indicative of quite how much Israel has changed shape, such change should not surprise us in the light of Givens's characterisation.) If so, then what is to say that they have not become hardened Israel?

That Givens does not embrace this possibility is potentially indicative of the fact that he is still partially in thrall, despite explicit tendencies that point in another direction,[44] to an essentialised understanding of 'belief in Christ'—where 'essentialised' entails fixed, easily identifiable, and a binary logic of in or out. This is the counterpart of the 'essentialised Jew', and analogously to the latter it

[44] Indeed, Givens specifically denies that we can 'presume to be "the insiders" or to define "the outsiders" of the argument [of Romans 9–11]' (*We the People*, 406). And he goes on to claim that 'Christians cannot presume to be living more adequately to that confession [of Jesus as Messiah] than are non-Christian Jews', and that 'Christians have a lot to learn about Jesus from many Jews and from Judaism' (407). Moreover, the whole thrust of his book is to undermine a binary or 'borders' logic. It is all the more surprising, then, that he does not follow through on these insights by thematising the church's identity as hardened Israel. A residual essentialism (however minimal) is a possible explanation.

assumes an unquestionable continuity between those who confess Christ in Paul's day and Christians who confess Christ today. Conversely, if 'hardened Israel' is defined by its rejection of Christ, then surely Christians today cannot be found among hardened Israel. Such essentialism is difficult, if not impossible, to sustain in the face of doctrinal controversy over the centuries, at stake in which is the question of what form true belief in Christ should take, and consequently who truly manifests that belief. When it is so easy for Christians to denounce other Christians, then why is it so difficult to break the connection between Paul's 'us' and Christians of later generations, and conversely to find Christians among hardened Israel?

If essentialised belief in Christ is historically questionable, then Barth's theological critique in *Romans* subjects it to a devastating blow from which there is no recovery. It does so by distinguishing between the Gospel of Jesus Christ as 'the impossible possibility of God', and the Church as 'the last human possibility'.[45] In their confrontation, the one dissolves the other. The Church is ranged with all other human possibilities (under the banner of 'religion') as that which God brings radically in question.[46] To be sure, it is the canal where the living waters of revelation have previously flowed; but it is an empty canal which can neither compel nor constrain them.[47] Thus 'belief in Christ', as a divine possibility, is not something the Church can lay claim to, either as such or by contrast with other human bodies. In Barth's words (commenting on Rom 11:20): 'But who is a believer? and who an unbeliever? Belief and unbelief are established only in God. For us they are unobservable, incomprehensible, and uncertain.'[48]

It is only a small step to the recognition that the Church, as a mere human possibility—far from being the 'us' of Rom 9:24—can only be hardened Israel. By extension, for Barth, 'the Jew' is 'the religious and ecclesiastical man', the

[45] Barth, *Romans*, 332. In the following exposition I capitalise 'Church' and 'Gentile', following the conventions of Barth's English translator.
[46] Ibid., 332-33.
[47] Ibid., 66-67. The metaphor is a favoured one.
[48] Ibid., 411.

insider.[49] Gentiles, by contrast, are those on the outside, who as empty-handed may be in some ways more fitting witnesses to divine grace.[50] But as soon as the Gentiles move from without to within, they are in turn subject to the same judgment as the Jews: claiming their superiority as recipients of new revelation, they have only dry canals to show for it (to draw on Barth's earlier metaphor), and can no longer 'escape the tribulation and guilt of the old Church'.[51] By contrast, the band of Jews and Gentiles referred to in 9:24 are 'not this or that collection of people who can be quantitatively defined'.[52]

What is to be gained from Barth's reading? On the one hand, Barth flattens out all human history in its contrast with the impossible possibility of God, and this has the negative consequence, among others, of evacuating the term 'Jew' of any particular significance. Likewise, 'Israel' is dehistoricised, becoming an abstract term for the pinnacle of human possibility. On the other hand, Barth frees the Gospel from an essentialism that prevents one from following through to its logical consequences the recognition—otherwise so powerfully present in Givens's account—of Israel's historical contingency. Specifically, one is no longer constrained to see Christians on one side of Paul's distinction between the hardened and the elect. As Barth so forcefully shows, the Church is not the Gospel, just as Christians are not Christ, and thus they neither have monopoly on, nor can be assured of, the gift of belief in Christ. As a consequence, being liberated from both poles of the dual mapping—from both the essentialised Jew and the essentialised Christian—one is freed to look for analogies between Paul's situation and our very different situation today in non-predetermined ways.

Recast within the non-Barthian framework of a historically contingent Israel, one can fruitfully return to Barth's discovery of the church in hardened Israel as an analogy that may be necessary to confront a persistent and pernicious supersessionism. As long as Christians see themselves on the side of the 'us', albeit in solidarity with the hardened other, they continue to style themselves as

[49] Ibid., 40.
[50] Ibid., 66-67 and 415.
[51] Ibid., 408-11 [411], commenting on Paul's development of the olive tree analogy in 11:17-22.
[52] Ibid., 360.

(superior) 'newcomers', by implicit contrast with an (outmoded) 'old' people—and thus perpetuate a supersessionism that Givens is otherwise so successful in diffusing. But as we have seen, Christians are (by and large) not newcomers into Israel, but well-established insiders, kinsfolk according to the flesh who are rehearsed in the traditions and customs of their forebears in the faith. Moreover, having institutionalised God's revelation, and stumbled on the grace of God in Christ (9:33), the church is subject to God's wrath. It is hardened Israel. On this reading, Christians are summoned not just to solidarity with sinners, but to confession of their own sin. It is only by way of first recognising themselves in hardened Israel, I suggest, that Christians can rediscover 'belief in Christ'.

Conclusion

In this theologically 'interested' reading, I have followed the strategy set out in the introduction: of identifying current mappings, then showing how these mappings are resisted by new historical perspectives, and finally suggesting a new analogical mapping. Let us retrace our steps. The mapping to be resisted is that of hardened Israel vs. the elect onto (non-Christian) Jews vs. Christians today. But on the one side, the Jewish contemporaries of Paul who rejected his gospel can neither be equated with later rabbinic Jews nor with Jews today (in all their diversity). To assume such an equation is to deny the underdetermined and constructivitist character of Jewish history, and to cling to an essentialised 'Jew' (however that is filled out). To deny the equation is not to deny continuity, but to embrace contested continuities that are variously constructed from different perspectives.[53] On the other side, the small band of Jewish and gentile Christ followers cannot be identified with the Christian church, as that which has come to be what it is in its institutionalisation over against an emerging Judaism. To make such an identification can only be to cling to an essentialised 'Christ-believer'. In short, the contours and boundaries of Israel in our day are quite different from those with which Paul had to reckon in his.

[53] This is where the either/or that creeps into aspects of the Judean/Jew debate is unhelpful.

We are invited, therefore, to a creative, analogical remapping. Israel is, extrapolating from Paul, the elect people woven through history by God, inclusive of the church. It is also, for Paul, the 'inside', where God's wrath is manifest as the necessary backdrop of God's mercy. The analogical space for Christians is, I suggest, the church—which while not exclusively Israel is where, from the Christian perspective, divine mercy and wrath become legible. Moreover, the church as a whole can only be hardened Israel, subject to God's wrath, since the divine mercy is only ever manifest in a precarious remnant, which as soon as it is formed is liable to becoming complacent and being 'lopped off'.

Where does this leave Jews? I suggest that Romans 9–11 cannot be made to speak directly about Jews today. Jews are not legible for Christians in the way that the church is, or in the way that Israel is for Paul. However, insofar as Romans 9–11 offers an understanding of Israel as characterised by divine election rather than human boundaries, Christians are invited to recognise in Jews fellow 'Israelites' and members of God's one covenant. And this will be an invitation to the discovery of new kinds of legibility, by way of analogies and disanalogies between Christians and Jews today—a discovery to which there are no shortcuts. Getting rid of the essentialised Jew, as well as the essentialised Christ-believer, should be to make way for such discovery without shortcuts.